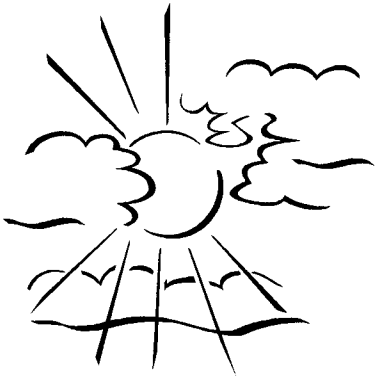


***Department  
of  
Human  
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\*Important story at this spot

# **Articles in Today's Clips**

## **Monday, April 3, 2006**

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Sunday, April 02, 2006

## **Audit: Counties owe big for kids State officials review more than 400 foster care cases in which federal funds may have been mistakenly received.**

Maureen Feighan / The Detroit News

Michigan's cash-strapped counties could be on the hook for millions of dollars in foster care expenses that the federal government had been paying, possibly in error.

A state audit uncovered 452 cases that may not have been eligible for the federal funds they were receiving.

County officials are concerned that the state could shift 50 percent of the cost to the counties.

The state pays the remaining 50 percent.

State officials said last week they're still working on a county-by-county breakdown of the ineligible cases to determine who might owe what. Oakland County officials say they received an e-mail late last month that as many as 100 cases now covered by federal dollars might not be eligible. The potential tab for the county: up to \$1.5 million.

"The state is trying all kinds of shenanigans to push costs down," said County Commissioner Chuck Moss. "They're trying to evade responsibility."

But state Department of Human Services officials deny that. They say rules are rules and they're simply following federal guidelines. State officials say foster care cases that don't qualify for federal funding are covered 50/50 by the state and counties.

"It's not a cost shift," said Mary Mehren, division manager of children's protective services, foster care and community-based services for the Human Services Department. "In state law, there are two ways to pay for home care, and it's just a matter of applying the federal government guidelines appropriately. ... We have no choice."

The state's audit of 5,335 cases, which found the 452 in question, was prompted by a federal review in March 2004 of 80 randomly selected foster care cases in Michigan funded by what are called Title IV-E funds. Title IV-E funds cover "out-of-home" costs for kids removed from their homes.

The review found 12 of the 80 cases had errors, including incorrectly filled out court orders, licensing problems and insufficient paperwork. Eight or fewer "cases in error" are allowed for a state to be considered compliant.

The review also found the federal government overpaid Michigan \$283,223.89 for cases that were ineligible for funding during the review period, April 1 through Sept. 30, 2003. The state has since paid that money back, Mehren said.

Following the review, Mehren said the state developed an improvement plan and teamed up with the state court administrator offices to make sure the same mistakes don't recur.

"We've been training every field worker and field office and training every judge and jurist on the proper administration since 2004," Mehren said. "We've had this plan in place and we've been working aggressively to make sure this doesn't happen again."

Michigan has approximately 3,877 kids in its foster care program whose care is covered by federal Title IV-E funds and state money. The state received \$111.6 million during the last budget year in Title IV-E funds.

Certain guidelines have to be met for eligibility, including documentation that reasonable efforts were made to keep families together and that keeping a child in his home would be contrary to his best interest, welfare or safety.

Tim Soave, Oakland County's fiscal services manager, said he's working now to arrange a meeting with the county's family court to determine who decides when kids are removed from their parents if the federal government should pick up part of the tab for foster care.

Is it possible kids were misclassified? Yes, he said.

"One of the issues that makes this difficult is there's different levels of eligibility for" federal funding, he said.

"It depends on the family's economic situation, the placement of where the kids are."

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At issue

Of the 5,335 foster care cases the state reviewed, 452 were found that weren't eligible for federal funding. That means counties may have to pick up half the tab. A spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services said that's a preliminary number and there could be other cases.

Published April 3, 2006

[ From the Lansing State Journal ]

## **Counties may owe foster care expenses**

Associated Press

DETROIT - A state audit has uncovered 452 cases where the federal government may have been improperly paying some foster care expenses totaling millions of dollars to Michigan counties, The Detroit News reported Sunday.

State officials are working on a county-by-county breakdown of the cases. Officials say foster care cases that don't qualify for federal funding are covered 50/50 by the state and counties.

"In state law, there are two ways to pay for home care, and it's just a matter of applying the federal government guidelines appropriately," said Mary Mehren, division manager of children's protective services, foster care and community-based services for the Human Services Department.

The state audited 5,335 cases after a 2004 federal review of 80 randomly selected foster care cases in Michigan funded by Title IV-E funds, which cover "out-of-home" costs for kids removed from their homes.

The review found the federal government overpaid Michigan \$283,223.89 for cases ineligible for funding. The state repaid that.

# Dad gets 22 years in abuse case

Saturday, April 1, 2006

By Jef Rietsma

Special to the Kalamazoo Gazette

CENTREVILLE -- A former Three Rivers man found guilty last year of first-degree child abuse was sentenced Friday to the maximum term of 22 1/2 years in prison.

Justin Montgomery, 25, will serve his time initially at the State Prison of Southern Michigan in Jackson for the January 2000 crime involving his month-old son, Kobe. With good behavior, Montgomery would serve no less than a 10-year stint.

Upon hearing the sentence, handed down by retired Hillsdale County Probate Court Judge Albert Neukom, Montgomery closed his eyes and laid his head back in his chair. His wife, Stephanie, cried.

His defense attorney, Randall Levine, had argued for a lighter sentence because Justin Montgomery still maintains his innocence. Kobe's injuries stemmed from birth-related complications and the bruising on his brain was the natural progression of those injuries, Levine said. Kobe, now 6, is in a vegetative state, and is dependent on a ventilator and feeding tube. Evidence presented during the two-week trial last June showed, and a subsequent 45-minute jury deliberation found, that Justin Montgomery was responsible for the brain damage that medical personnel said was consistent with shaken-baby syndrome, said Charles Herman, chief assistant prosecuting attorney.

Neukom concurred, saying medical experts who testified during the trial agreed 29-day-old Kobe was feeding and developing as a healthy child -- in spite of his difficult birth -- the morning of Jan. 21, 2000, when the baby was left in the care of Justin Montgomery. When Stephanie Montgomery returned from work that afternoon, it was clear Kobe was not the same, Neukom said.

Presiding as a visiting circuit judge, Neukom called the matter a tragedy, and said the sentencing guidelines should not be amended for a lighter punishment. A previous charge of breaking and entering caused Montgomery to be labeled a habitual offender, a factor that added to the length of his sentence, Neukom said.

Also during Friday's sentencing, Kobe's adoptive father spoke about the consequences of Justin Montgomery's actions. Ross Williams said he and his wife, Connie, have done everything possible to make Kobe's life brighter.

"Kobe will never be able to play ball, he will never be teased by a girl for being so cute ... he is sweet, cuddly and even though he is in a vegetative state he still smiles when he sees us, and that's when it makes everything we do for him worthwhile," Williams said.

The Williams said it costs the state and Medicaid a combined \$18,557 a month for all the medicine, equipment and services necessary to keep 6-year-old Kobe alive.

# Child abuse case ends in probation

By NORMA LERNER / Niles Daily Star

*Monday, April 3, 2006 10:30 AM EDT*

CASSOPOLIS - A 40-year-old Niles woman convicted of third-degree child abuse against her disabled son received three years of probation and a suspended jail term Friday in Cass County Circuit Court.

Lora Baugher of 11 South Third Street whose son, now 18, was suffering from malnutrition, is being cared for in a facility in Missouri where his health is flourishing. He is eating, gaining weight and is communicating, said Chief Assistant Prosecutor Jason Ronning, who requested that Baugher's sentencing be within her guideline range of zero to nine months. "It's a shame for what happened," he said.

Baugher was charged with second-and-third-degree child abuse on Nov. 1 after a 15-month investigation by the Michigan State Police and the Cass County Prosecutor's Office.

The case came to the attention of authorities on April 5, 2004, when Baugher's son, Paul Benko, then 16, was found malnourished, dehydrated, experiencing kidney failure, weighing approximately 40 pounds, was physically dirty and suffering from open bedsores, according to a news release. Benko had been disabled as an infant due to suffering head injuries consistent with shaken baby syndrome.

He had been living with his parents in California and subsequently developed cerebral palsy. He was disabled, unable to speak and was confined to a wheelchair.

Judge Michael Dodge recounted it was in April, 2004, when Baugher was traveling in Illinois with another son when Benko became ill on a freeway and was airlifted to a children's hospital in Missouri.

He was suffering from severe malnutrition, acute urination failure, bedsores and bowel obstruction.

A later test indicated an "unexplainable" amount of marijuana and amphetamines in his system, Dodge said.

Dodge said it was a challenge for Baugher to take care of Benko, and she did follow medical advice.

His condition was irreprehensible, Dodge said, before imposing her probation term which he said was a plea bargain. She would have faced two years in prison.

Defense Attorney Dale Blunier agreed the abuse situation was serious, but Baugher is now gainfully employed, he said.

Dodge suspended Baugher's 180-day-jail term for 18 months to see how she complies with the probation term.

She is to pay a \$1,440 probation fee and \$920 in court costs.

# Job lost over trip to bathroom

GRAND BLANC TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Saturday, April 01, 2006

By Bob Wheaton

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GRAND BLANC - A Grand Blanc School District bus driver said a trip to the bathroom cost her her job.

When nature called, Tamie Crawford left up to 19 elementary school children unattended last week while the bus was parked at Reid Elementary School.

"I had no choice," said Crawford, who has been diagnosed with irritable bowel syndrome, according to a letter from her doctor. "I couldn't have stopped what was happening."

A dismissal letter from Personnel Director Diane Wilbur says it wasn't the first time Crawford left students alone.

"Your decision to leave your students unattended places the safety of students in disregard, which is an act that cannot be tolerated," the letter says.

Parents had mixed reactions on the firing, agreeing they were troubled by students being left alone on the bus, but unsure if Crawford should have been targeted.

Superintendent Gary Lipe wouldn't comment on the firing, which occurred five days after the March 23 incident.

"She's already made it clear that she's going to challenge this through grievance procedures that we have, so there won't be any comment because of that," Lipe said.

Crawford said she believes she was really fired as retaliation for helping bus drivers file grievances in her position as union president and for getting an earlier suspension of herself reduced after filing a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

In last week's incident, she said she had diarrhea and suddenly had to go to the bathroom as her bus arrived at the school about 10 minutes before classes began. Irritable bowel syndrome is a disorder that can cause diarrhea.

Children usually remain on the bus with their driver until the bell rings,

Crawford said, so she told older students to supervise while she went inside. Students in grades K-5 were on the bus, she said.

There were no other adults around, Crawford said, and she didn't have time to call an adult to the vehicle.

"I didn't have the luxury of advance notice," she said. "I wish I did, but I didn't."

## QUICK TAKE

According to the Webster's New World Medical Dictionary, irritable bowel syndrome is a common gastrointestinal disorder in which stomach contractions are abnormal. It's characterized by abdominal pain, bloating and irregular bowel habits with alternating diarrhea and constipation. Treatment options include a high-fiber diet, medications, exercise, relaxation techniques and avoidance of caffeine, milk products and sweeteners.

She said she took the bus keys and was gone for no more than three or four minutes. When she returned, her supervisor was standing by the bus.

Crawford said she's had to leave children on the bus a handful of other times to go to the bathroom.

"I do understand that there could be a problem (leaving children on the bus)," she said.

"Anything can happen. Anything's possible. I was at the school."

Parent Debbie Ray, whose kindergartner rode Crawford's bus before her firing, said she's concerned about children being alone on the bus, but she's not sure Crawford is to blame.

"I would think they would try to come up with a solution by having someone there to relieve the (bus drivers) if they can," she said.

Two other Reid parents said they sympathize with Crawford, but don't think children should be left unattended.

"If she knew that it was a fireable offense, then she probably should have been fired," said Katherine Livengood, who has two children at the school. "It's sad that she got fired over it."

Livengood said she always sees other adults outside the school before classes begin, so Crawford should have summoned someone to watch the children.

Andrea Mraz, who has two children at Reid, said she doesn't know whether the driver should have been fired.

"I'd probably be upset that my kids were alone, but at the same time understand that she does have this physical problem," she said.

Crawford, 46, of Burton had been a Grand Blanc bus driver for 10 years. In addition to the grievance, she said she plans to file a lawsuit and a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.



## Medicare Drug Challenge

Published: April 3, 2006

The chaotic Medicare prescription drug program seems to be stumbling less lately. Complaints and call waiting times are diminishing, and many previously uninsured patients are clearly saving money on drug purchases. But the program now faces two hurdles that may shed light on whether it is on the road to recovery or perhaps irredeemably flawed.

The first hurdle is already upon us with the expiration of a grace period for providing emergency medicine to millions of poor people who had been receiving their drugs through state Medicaid programs and were automatically switched to new Medicare drug plans that often covered different drugs. The new plans were supposed to keep providing the old medicines on a transitional basis, but many people had horrendous experiences when pharmacists were unable to verify that they had any coverage or what the proper copayments should be. More than 30 states stepped in to keep paying for the drugs while the confusion was sorted out, but many of these stopgap rescue efforts are expiring as well.

That will leave many patients at the mercy of Medicare's new private drug plans, which will have to decide whether to continue patients on their old medicines or switch them to cheaper drugs preferred by the plan. There is an appeals process by which patients can request drugs that they consider medically necessary, but advocacy groups complain that some plans are making it difficult for doctors and their patients to navigate the bureaucratic shoals. Medicare officials will need to ensure that all plans rule promptly on appeals, based solely on medical need, and do not use administrative barriers to discourage use of therapeutically advantageous drugs simply because they are more costly.

An even more important hurdle comes on May 15, which marks the end of the period in which people may enroll without suffering a financial penalty for dawdling. Enrollment has been moving up steadily in recent weeks, but more than a third of all Medicare beneficiaries still lack drug coverage. Some political leaders are calling for the deadline to be extended — perhaps until the end of the year — to allow more time for people to make up their minds. That seems premature. The program's success depends heavily on getting lots of healthy people to sign up so that their premiums can help subsidize medicine for the chronically ill. The deadline should serve as a useful prod to force fence-sitters to make a decision.

Op-Ed Contributor

# The Health of a Nation

By ALLAN B. HUBBARD

The New York Times

Published: April 3, 2006

Washington

IN the past five years, private health insurance premiums have risen 73 percent. Some businesses have responded by dropping healthcare coverage, leaving employees uninsured. Other employers pass the costs on to workers, both by raising co-payments and premiums and by denying workers the wage increases they need to afford these higher prices.

What is driving this unsustainable run-up in health insurance costs, and how can we make things better?

Health care is expensive because the vast majority of Americans consume it as if it were free.

Health insurance policies with low deductibles insulate people from the cost of the medical care they use — so much so that they often do not even ask for prices. And people don't recognize the high premium costs of this low-deductible insurance because premiums are paid by employers.

Finally, the tax code subsidizes these expensive, employer-purchased insurance policies.

To control health care costs, we must give consumers an incentive to spend money wisely. We can do this by encouraging the purchase of high-deductible policies and providing the same tax benefits for out-of-pocket health spending that employer-provided insurance enjoys. The overall cost to the consumer will be no greater than it is now and, in most cases, significantly lower. And no consumer is better than the American consumer at driving prices down and quality up.

The president has proposed a package of reforms that will spur such changes by building on the success of consumer-directed Health Savings Accounts and the insurance policies that go with them. Health Savings Accounts allow people to save money tax-free to pay their out-of-pocket health costs, as long as they have high-deductible health policies to cover catastrophic expenses. Enrollment in these accounts has grown rapidly since their introduction in 2003, with more than three million people now contributing to them.

The president's reforms would make these plans even more attractive by providing payroll tax relief to those who hold Health Savings Accounts (currently the accounts are only exempt from income taxes); giving employers more incentive to offer and contribute to the accounts; and making it easier for consumers to get the information they need to make good decisions about the health care they purchase.

The accounts aren't just good for the health care system — they're a good deal for American families. Catastrophic policies have affordable premiums that bring health insurance into reach for lower-income families. And the low premiums compensate for most, if not all, of the policies' higher deductibles.

Consider the following two real policies offered by the same insurer in Columbus, Ohio, for a healthy family of four earning \$50,000 a year. A Health Savings Account policy has a premium of \$3,750, a deductible of \$3,000, and co-insurance of 20 percent up to a maximum of \$5,000.

Meanwhile, a traditional Preferred Provider Organization policy has a premium of \$5,800, a deductible of \$1,000, and 10 percent co-insurance up to a maximum of \$2,000. If the family's medical bills totaled \$1,000, they would save \$1,900 by choosing the Health Savings Account policy. Under the president's policy proposals, the savings would jump to \$3,200. Even if something catastrophic confronted the family with \$10,000 in medical bills (fewer than 20 percent of families face costs this high in a year), under the current law, the family would pay only \$400 more by choosing the Health Savings Account rather than the P.P.O. Under the president's proposals, they'd save \$1,600. That's why 40 percent of these Health Savings Account-based policies are purchased by families with incomes lower than \$50,000. These affordable policies are also an attractive option for employers that might not otherwise provide health insurance. With premiums rising, only 60 percent of companies offered their workers health insurance in 2005, compared with 69 percent in 2000. A recent study showed that a third of the small businesses offering policies based on Health Savings Accounts had not previously offered their employees insurance at all.

Imagine how the world might look if patients, armed with information about the price and quality of health care, set out to find the best possible value. We saw this with Lasik eye surgery, a procedure not covered by most insurance plans. Its price fell by almost half, and the number of procedures performed increased 10-fold from 1998 to 2002, as more doctors began providing the service and customers shopped around. Informed consumers could bring down costs throughout the health care industry by choosing only high-value care, making providers raise quality and lower prices to compete for their business, and spurring the development of the kind of cost-effective innovation we see in other parts of the economy.

Health Savings Accounts will help unleash this consumer power. This makes them both a good deal for the people who enroll in them and good medicine for the system as a whole. They give consumers more choices while strengthening their role in reducing waste, promoting competition and increasing value. By enabling consumers and doctors to make health care decisions that are right for them, we can greatly improve the effectiveness, affordability and value of our health care spending.

Allan B. Hubbard is assistant to the president for economic policy and director of the National Economic Council.

# Highfields: CEO's exit all but inevitable; focus now turns to board

A Lansing State Journal editorial

Published April 3, 2006

Highfields took another necessary step to restoring its residential treatment programs last week by dismissing the agency's president, Jim Hines.

That is not to say Hines was the source of mistreatment problems at the youth treatment center. We've seen no evidence for that charge.

What the evidence from county and state investigations has shown, though, was that Highfields had problems. These problems were so severe that two big clients, Ingham County and the state of Michigan, severed their ties.

Such a loss of confidence, loss of trust, puts any CEO in the crosshairs. Hines was the man on the spot; his exit was, in some ways, inevitable. How could Highfields convince Ingham County and the state to resume business if the person in charge when trouble occurred was still in charge?

But the dispatch of a CEO rarely fixes all that ails a business - especially one doing the sensitive work Highfields does: handling troubled youth.

Still to be determined is if Highfields can find new leadership and draft and execute new policies that will engender local trust.

Those responsibilities still remain squarely on Highfields' board. Just as Hines was in day-to-day charge when Ingham County judges and the state felt the need to pull their youths from Highfields, the current board was in overall charge.

With Hines gone, the spotlight moves firmly to the board. What board policies will change to ensure tighter oversight? What will members do, individually and collectively, to win the confidence of public officials?

The good news is that Highfields appears serious about correcting problems. But the work is far from complete.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: LSJ Editorial Page Editor Mark Nixon is a member of Highfields' board. To avoid a conflict of interest, Nixon has recused himself from Highfields board meetings and from LSJ Editorial Board work on the issue.)

# Detroit parents could pay for their children's crimes

April 1, 2006

BY CHASTITY PRATT and AMBER HUNT  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

The sins of children might mean fines and jail time for Detroit parents. Noting a 25% jump in the number of juvenile crimes in the last year, city police and 36th District Court judges pledged Friday to begin enforcing a little-used parental responsibility statute that has been on the books since 1987.

If a law-breaking youth's parents are found to be repeatedly negligent in their parental duties, a judge may fine them up to \$500 and sentence them to serve up to 90 days in jail.

"It's not the Police Department's responsibility to raise somebody's child," Chief Ella Bully-Cummings said. "We're just trying to make parents responsible for a duty that is not only required by law, but by nature."

Dozens of cities in the country have such laws, including Chicago and Cincinnati. In metro Detroit, Dearborn, Taylor, Warren and Southfield have so-called parental responsibility ordinances.

Shawn Smith, a 34-year-old father of a seventh-grader at Drew Middle School on Detroit's west side, said he thinks it's a good idea.

"Parents need to get on their jobs because these kids are getting wilder and wilder," Smith said Friday as he waited for his daughter to come out of school.

Detroit's enforcement is not a temporary crackdown, Bully-Cummings said. It will be ongoing, and parents of children who commit various offenses -- from truancy to murder -- may be charged. In most cases, she said, parents will be warned after a first offense.

Though Detroit's law has been on the books for nearly two decades, it has been used only occasionally and mostly for truancy and curfew violations, said police spokesman James Tate. That's also been the case in other communities in the area with such laws on their books, even though they could have broader applications.

"If you can show a parent encouraged or contributed to the juvenile's behavior, or if the parent in any way caused that behavior, we can use it," said Sgt. Glenn Cariveau of the Dearborn Police Department's Investigative Division, who acknowledged application of that city's law is rare. In Detroit, the parents of 23 Mackenzie High School students will be among the first under the new enforcement efforts to be charged with violating the ordinance, Tate said Friday.

The students walked out of classes Wednesday to protest the dress code and conditions at the school. At the protest, eggs and bottles were thrown. The students were charged with disorderly conduct.

Cierra Jackson, 15, a sophomore at Mackenzie, said she was among the protesters.

She wasn't arrested, but she said she might have thought twice about walking out of classes if she had known that her mother could have been ticketed. Even so, she said, the law won't make all kids behave.

"It's not going to change" everyone, Jackson said Friday. "When the police are here and parked on the grass, it doesn't stop anything from happening, so how is this?"

Richard Wargin, the police chief in Cudahy, Wis., said a similar law in his city is basically worthless.

"It seems like a great idea on paper, but when you try to implement it, it's more difficult than we thought," he said.

The trick is in proving the parents were negligent, which he said requires extra investigation and more money.

In a cash-strapped city like Detroit, that might be hard to come by, but Bully-Cummings said enforcement shouldn't be too expensive: It's basically writing a ticket and then letting the court handle it.

Shannon Adams, whose daughter is a 10th-grader at Mackenzie, also wondered how effective the ordinance will be.

"I do believe most parents are giving the information they are supposed to give" to their children about how to behave, Adams, a teacher at Hamtramck Academy, said Friday. "And when children are with their peers, they make different decisions."

Dan Chaney, the juvenile justice director for the Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services, said punitive approaches in dealing with parents "have not really been successful."

But, Chaney said, "It's worth a try. ... It may help with some individuals, but in those families that have compound problems and challenges, it's more than parental enforcement. We need resources and supports."

The Children's Aid Society will be expected to help find support services for parents who are convicted of violating the ordinance. The group has offices in each police precinct, holds parenting classes and assists children and families in finding the help they need.

Bully-Cummings is hopeful the effort will make a difference. She plans to hold a news conference Monday afternoon at police headquarters to talk about the enforcement effort.

"We realized we have a revolving door," she said. "These young people know there is no real penalty."

Contact **CHASTITY PRATT** at 313-223-4537 or [pratt@freepress.com](mailto:pratt@freepress.com). Staff writers Jack Kresnak, Dan Cortez and Gina Damron contributed to this report.

#### What the law says

- "It is the continuous duty of the parent of any minor to exercise reasonable control to prevent the minor from committing any delinquent act."
  - Illegal drugs or firearms must be kept out of the home, and legal firearms should be locked in places inaccessible to minors.
  - Youths must be required to know and observe the city's curfew.
  - Children must be required to attend school and forbidden to be absent without parental or school permission.
  - Proper supervision must be arranged when the parent must be absent.
  - Children must be forbidden from keeping stolen property, illegally possessing firearms or illegal drugs, or associating with known juvenile delinquents.
- Help must be sought for handling or controlling any minor who has been caught with stolen property, legal or illegal firearms and illegal drugs. Parents' penalties

- In most cases, the parent will get a warning and information about the ordinance. If it is proven that a parent encouraged, caused or contributed to the child's delinquent act, the penalties for the parent are:
  - **First offense:** A fine of \$75 to \$100 upon a parent's conviction.
  - **Second offense:** A fine of \$100 to \$500 and probation upon completion of a court-approved treatment program such as parenting classes, or 15 to 30 days in jail.
  - **Third and subsequent offenses:** A fine of \$250 to \$500 and 15 to 90 days in jail, or probation upon completion of a government-sponsored work program for the duration of the sentence.

# **Teens may be charged as adults in arson case**

## **Fire damaged South Lyon auditorium last month**

Saturday, April 01, 2006

BY SUSAN L. OPPAT  
Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Oakland County prosecutors will ask a juvenile court judge to allow them to try two students as adults on charges they set a fire last month in the South Lyon High School auditorium just as classes were about to begin.

Chief Deputy Prosecutor Debbie Carley said Friday that the 15-year-old boy and 16-year-old girl are charged as juveniles with arson of real property, which is a 10-year felony for adults. The News is withholding their names until they appear in court.

Carley said the fire caused an estimated \$400,000-\$500,000 damage to the high school auditorium, where a \$1 million renovation was completed in October. Most of the damage was caused by the sprinkler system, which destroyed the carpeting and seats, along with some of the walls.

South Lyon Police Lt. Steve Sharpe said the girl told investigators that she and the boy set fire to a couple of seats in the auditorium March 16 because they didn't want to go to school. But Carley said Friday that "no one is really sure" why the teens did it.

Carley said the law only allowed her to charge the pair with arson of real property, rather than arson of an occupied dwelling, a 20-year felony, because the school is not a dwelling. That charge would have allowed Carley to charge the teens as adults without first going through a juvenile court hearing.

The arson of real property charge, which is less serious, forced her to charge the pair as juveniles because they are not 17, she said. She wants to charge them as adults, she said, because there were about 2,000 people in the building when the fire was set, and any or all of them could have been killed or injured in the fire or evacuation.

Carley said the teens will first have to appear at a probable cause hearing in juvenile court, then at a separate hearing for the judge to determine if they should be charged as adults. If the charges remain in juvenile court, the pair can only remain in court custody until they turn 21.

The juvenile court hearings are scheduled for April 20.

Susan Oppat can be reached at [soppat@annarbornews.com](mailto:soppat@annarbornews.com) or at 734- 482-1166.



# **Court adds electronic child-support payments**

## **Money will arrive faster, state will save.**

PUBLISHED: April 1, 2006

By Jameson Cook  
Macomb Daily Staff Writer

Macomb County residents who collect child support soon will receive the money faster and with more certainty.

The county's approximately 37,000 child-support recipients will collect the payments either by debit card or direct deposit into a savings or checking account in about two weeks.

The system, a statewide policy to comply with a new state law, will save the state \$2 million annually once in place because it replaces having to mail checks to more than 200,000 residents. "This should be a more cost-effective and efficient way for our customers to get their money," said David Mork, director of the state Disbursement Unit within the state Department of Human Services.

Those who receive payments this weekend will start receiving mailed notices asking them to choose between being issued a Visa debit card or designating an account in which to deposit payments. Those who do not choose will be sent a debit card.

In Michigan, nearly \$1.4 billion was disbursed in 2005, a slight drop from 2004 that officials attributed to the lagging state economy. In Macomb County, more than \$100 million was disbursed. The average monthly payment is about \$500, officials said.

Recipients will get their money from the Disbursement Unit a day after the Friend of the Court receives it.

"This is going to solve the problem of people losing their checks or having them stolen," said Lynn Davidson, director of the county Friend of the Court.

The card will be automatically debited with the child-support payment each week, bi-weekly or monthly.

Not only will the system save taxpayer dollars in mailing and administrative costs, it will save recipients the cost of cashing a check, officials noted. Check-cashing businesses charge fees for their services.

There is no fee to use the debit card at "point of sale" locations that accept Visa debit cards, such as grocery stores, department stores and gas stations. Holders can receive cash back from the 29,000 Interlink merchants in Michigan, and can get cash for no charge at a bank or credit union that processes Visa cash advances. Those who use automated teller machines will have to pay the required fee.

For more details, visit [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs).

# Divorced dad understands

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Monday, April 03, 2006

JOURNAL READER

It is a shame something like the action by Matt Dubay and the National Center for Men has to be sought ["Activists seek right to say no to fatherhood," March 9, Page A1]. But as a divorced father of three kids, I feel like for some there would be no other choice. The system takes the children from the father, even if the divorce was no fault of his own. The court allows the children to be moved miles away, reduces his income to an unlivable amount and gives the father no more rights than you would have with a family pet.

Good luck, Mr. Dubay, but also get The National Center for Men to get some guts from our judges, and honest and family-values-type lawyers. We could put Friend of Court out of business. Kids would grow up with two parents equal in all ways. What a perfect world for our children.

Glen L. Alden  
Flint

# Cox cracks down on nursing home staff

By: Monroe Evening News and AP

Story updated April 01. 2006 1:26AM

Three workers from Monroe among the seven charged in state.  
Three nursing home workers from Monroe are being charged with falsifying their criminal backgrounds on applications for employment under a crackdown organized by Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox.

The charges result from the third round of Mr. Cox's so-called "Nursing Home Initiative," a continuing series of investigations into the criminal backgrounds of nursing home employees.

Warrants filed in Monroe County District Court allege that:

David Wayne Palka, 36, of Monroe applied for a job in housekeeping knowing that he had been convicted of two felonies in Oklahoma - possession of a stolen vehicle and smuggling contraband into a prison.

Brandi Rose Nowitzke, 24, of Monroe applied for work as a certified nurse's assistant on June 3, 2005, and failed to advise the nursing home that she had been convicted on or about May 20, 2004, on a felony charge of possession with intent to deliver cocaine.

Amaryllis Gilbert, 40, of Monroe for applying for employment on Aug. 29, 2003, as a certified nurse's assistant, without disclosing that she had been convicted of domestic violence in Monroe County District Court in 1998 and had pleaded guilty in 2000 for resisting and obstructing an officer.

The three were among seven around the state Mr. Cox is charging with falsifying employment applications to gain nursing home employment.

"Placing a loved one in a nursing facility requires a great commitment of trust," Mr. Cox said. "It's imperative that the trust not be breached by employees who falsify their backgrounds for their own gain. My office will continue to work aggressively to ensure that Michigan's residents can feel safe, confident and secure in nursing facilities."

The charges came on the eve of today's effective date of a new law regarding background checks for residential care facilities.

The new law, among other things, expands the number of crimes that can disqualify a nursing home applicant from employment - adding drug and theft offenses. It also expands the disqualification period for serious felonies, makes it a crime not to conduct a criminal background check, and mandates fingerprint checks for employees.

The penalty for falsifying an employment application is 90 days in jail and/or a \$500 fine.

# **Smash Bash '06**

Coldwater Daily Reporter

April 3, 2006

The Branch County Coalition Against Domestic Violence hosted a pie-throwing fund-raiser on Saturday, April 1 at the Eagle's Hall on Butters Avenue in Coldwater. Above, Branch County Sheriff Warren Canon and Undersheriff James Jeffrey take great joy in sharing the pie with Frank Barker of the Branch County Sheriff's Office (BCSO). Sheriff Canon got it back from wife, Betsy. Warren and Betsy Canon weren't the only husband and wife on hand to get a little revenge because the Coalition's Misty Blankenship and her husband, Fred, of the BCSO and Prosecutor's Office, also took part in the fun. Branch County's Prosecuting Attorney Kirk Kashian didn't escape the mess, as Terri Norris and Rolen Fadden, both of the his office, ensured their boss a taste. The event was not open to the general public, and all the proceeds went to the Coalition and Altrusa Teen S.H.A.R.E. The pies were auctioned off to the highest bidder, and those receiving pies all volunteered their time to raise money for the cause.

# Free help on taxes earns a hug

Monday, April 03, 2006

AMY BARTNER  
THE SAGINAW NEWS

He's made people cry, and some have offered to pay him.

Others have more affectionate gestures to show their appreciation to Bay City resident Tim J. Slezak.

"I've been hugged," he said.

All because he helped them with their taxes.

Slezak is one of about 20 volunteers participating in VITA, or Volunteer Income Tax Assistance, at the Butman-Fish Library, 1716 Hancock in Saginaw. The volunteers offer free assistance to senior citizens and low-income or disabled people.

The operation, which began in early February, will run almost daily until Monday, April 17, and it's first-come, first-served.

"When they realize they can come in here and have it done for free, they're pretty happy," Slezak said as he helped a Saginaw man fix a problem with his taxes.

The man, Samuel Sledge, had paid for professional tax assistance but he later discovered a mistake: the pros hadn't considered some of the expenses for his small business.

After Slezak helped him, Sledge saved a few hundred dollars.

Next year, Sledge said, "I will come here and see Tim."

Slezak, a Dow Chemical Co. retiree, said he began volunteering for VITA seven years ago. To become a volunteer, he had to go through a three-day seminar for training.

"Taxes were foreign to me," he said.

Now, he takes the seminar each year with new volunteers and is one of the most experienced in the effort. The group uses computers loaned from the IRS and e-files most of the taxes.

"I need to give back something, and I like doing this," Slezak said.

Early each year, so many people come for help -- as many as 170 people each day -- that volunteers turn some away.

"It's a zoo, and we have to turn them away," he said. "It's hard because a lot of times they've sat for two or three hours, and we have to tell them we can't take them."

Other days are slow, and the appointments, which average 15 minutes to an hour, are steady.

Volunteer Barbara J. Witkowski said that between working at the library and then filing the forms at her home, she puts in as many as 60 hours a week.

"It's kind of a rewarding program, otherwise we wouldn't keep coming back," she said, laughing.

David B. Wade, 45, of Saginaw came to the library to e-file his taxes but was nervous about the system. That's when he noticed VITA and had a volunteer double-check his numbers and then file it.

"They were real helpful," Wade said, adding that his appointment lasted about 30 minutes.

"That's faster than it took me."

Amy Bartner is a staff writer for The Saginaw News. You may reach her at 776-9688.

# Immigration reforms would reach all the way to Michigan

Monday, April 03, 2006

By Sarah Kellogg **Washington Bureau**

WASHINGTON -- Reforming the nation's complex immigration laws may hit closer to home than many Michigan residents think.

The more than 11 million illegal immigrants living in this country don't just call California and Texas home. They also can be found in Michigan, working in local restaurants, day-care centers and orchards.

As the U.S. Senate considers legislation this week to rewrite federal immigration laws, more than 70,000 Michigan residents who are here illegally will be watching, acutely aware that whatever happens will change their lives and the lives of those who live and work with them.

"Illegal immigrants are everywhere, and the numbers are growing and growing and growing," said U.S. Rep. Candice Miller, R-Harrison Township, who backs the stricter House plan. "It's coming to the point where we can't sweep it under the rug anymore. We have to do something." While Michigan isn't the mecca for immigrants that California is, it has seen its share of legal and illegal immigrants steadily increase. A decade ago, about 37,000 illegal aliens were estimated to live in Michigan; now it's 70,000, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security says.

Since 2000, some 101,000 legal immigrants have moved into Michigan,

About 594,700 people living in Michigan were foreign-born in 2003, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. In 2004, 18,334 individuals in Michigan were granted permanent legal status. The top three countries of origin were India (2,507), Iraq (1,360) and Mexico (1,187).

This week, senators will try to find a way to keep the doors open for legal immigrants while solving the illegal immigrant problem. It won't be easy to find a solution before their spring recess, which starts Friday, because GOP leaders are split on whether to force all 11 million illegal aliens out or provide them with a chance to stay and work legally.

President Bush, who favors allowing illegal immigrants to stay, has pressured lawmakers to act quickly, recognizing that as the election gets closer it might be harder to get a reform bill.

The House bill, which was passed in December, has been the starting point for the Senate debate. It would make it a felony to be in the United States illegally and would require employers to verify Social Security numbers of employees or face penalties. It also mandates the construction of a fence along 700 miles of the 2,000-mile border between Mexico and the United States.

Many in the business community and those working in social service programs think the House bill, with its emphasis on enforcement and security, failed to settle on a humane, economically viable and workable solution to the nation's immigration problems.

"We believe the immigration system does need to be reformed to respond to the reality of all these separated families," said David Maluchnik, a spokesman for the Michigan Catholic Conference, which helps immigrants find food, shelter and jobs. "We support an earned legalization for those people who are in the country, so they have to take numerous steps to gain permanent citizenship."

Last week, the Senate Judiciary Committee approved a proposal that answers the concerns of business leaders, many of whom want to ensure continued access to a work force that is both plentiful and cheap.

Carl Levin, Michigan's senior senator, said the committee bill provides more guards and technology to monitor borders while also requiring illegal immigrants to earn their right to stay here by paying fines and agreeing to extensive background checks.

"It would create a sustainable temporary worker program to help fill the lowest-wage jobs, which pay little and are short of American takers," Levin said in a statement. "And it would provide a path to citizenship that does not bump anybody who is here legally."

The committee's version of the immigration rewrite is a road map to citizenship for illegal immigrants. It would allow those living here before 2004 to work legally for the next six years by paying a \$1,000 fine. After another five years, they would have a chance at citizenship if they paid another \$1,000 fine, any back taxes they owed and learned English.

In addition, the bill would establish a guest-worker program for 1.5 million agricultural workers, allowing them to move back and forth across the border. That's been a must-have provision for the nation's farmers who have feared that a tough immigration bill would cut off migrant labor supplies.

"We understand we need to have a secure border, but along with that we need a guest-worker program," said David Rabe, an Oceana County fruit grower and president of the Oceana County Farm Bureau. "It seems like the agriculture sector always gets left out."

"On my farm, I hire about 30 people during the peak season. They're all migrant labor. I can't find local people who would even want to come out and pick fruit. I've got to rely on migrant labor to do my harvesting. If they close the borders, I don't know what will happen."

While much of the focus is on illegal immigrants, part of the reform will look at how best to treat immigrants coming here legally for education and work opportunities. Many senators, corporate leaders and educational institutions would like the number of temporary visas increased to accommodate foreign interest and U.S. need.

University officials say the reforms should include a more welcoming policy toward foreign students and workers for hard-to-fill jobs in engineering or the sciences.

After 9/11, the United States issued fewer visas. Student visas dropped from 298,730 in 2001 to 219,852 in 2003, according to the latest immigration data. Temporary worker visas declined as well from 348,995 in 2001 to 286,930 in 2003.

"It's important that we allow foreign students to find their way to our college and university campuses," said Mary Sue Coleman, president of the University of Michigan. "Our universities, our communities and our country benefit from having this pool of talent, which not only wants to come here to learn, but often wants to come here to live."

Contact reporter Sarah Kellogg at (202) 383-7810 or e-mail her at [skellogg@boothnewspapers.com](mailto:skellogg@boothnewspapers.com).

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 31, 2006

## **Granholt Calls Minimum Wage Increase a Team Victory**

### ***Thanks Volunteers for Their Hard Work, Says More Work to be Done***

LANSING – In her weekly radio address, Governor Jennifer M. Granholt today celebrated the first increase in Michigan's minimum wage in nine years and credited citizens with getting the legislation passed.

"This is a tremendous victory for our working families and for all of Michigan," Granholt said. "Without those citizens who overwhelmingly support this increase, it wouldn't have been possible. I want to thank all those Michiganders who have repeatedly and loudly called for Lansing to take action."

In her State of the State Address earlier this year, Granholt vowed to raise the minimum wage for the citizens of Michigan. On Tuesday, she signed Senate Bill 318, which increases the state's minimum wage from \$5.15 per hour to \$7.40 per hour over the next two years.

On October 1 of this year, the minimum wage will jump from \$5.15 to \$6.95 per hour. It will jump again to \$7.15 on July 1, 2007, and again to \$7.40 on July 1, 2008.

In her radio address, Granholt credited many groups for their hard work in getting a raise for Michigan, including: Michigan's labor unions, Michigan House and Senate Democrats, and most importantly, the countless volunteers who stood in the cold, went door to door, who collected signatures, and who raised support for the minimum wage ballot.

While declaring a team victory, Granholt reiterated the need to continue the fight for working men and women in Michigan.

"We have a comprehensive economic plan that we are working everyday to create jobs today, jobs tomorrow, and opportunity for our citizens," Granholt said. "Just like minimum wage, we're going to work until we implement every single piece of that plan until we secure the future for every single citizen in Michigan."

The Governor's weekly radio address is released each Friday at 10:00 a.m. and may be heard on broadcast stations across the state through an affiliation with the Michigan Association of Broadcasters. The address will also be available on the Governor's website on Mondays as a podcast for general distribution to personal MP3 players and home computers.



# Granholt in Saginaw Monday for wage-hike celebration

Kathie Marchlewski, Midland Daily News

04/01/2006

It's been a long time coming, and now that the minimum-wage increase has been passed, Gov. Jennifer Granholm is celebrating, though she might face some somber people in Saginaw Monday.

"I would suspect the overwhelming number of people there would be strong supporters of her. They'll also know it doesn't affect them at all," said state Sen. Mike Goschka R-Brant. "I think more than anything else, people are interested in talking about jobs."

Granholt's celebration is to take place at Victorious Believers Ministries, 624 Outer Drive. The 6 p.m. event will come as 6,800 area workers prepare for possible closure of Delphi's Saginaw and Buena Vista plants.

"It's unfortunate, the timing," acknowledges state Rep. Carl Williams, D-Saginaw. "She had no way of knowing."

He doesn't think locals will bring up potential job losses and local misfortunes during Granholm's visit, since the problem is a larger scale one -- bought on by larger forces such as globalization and international trade agreements.

Granholt is thinking about local workers as she prepares to visit the area.

"We stand with the Delphi workers, their families, and the communities deeply affected by Delphi's announcement, and we will do all we can in Michigan to help them cope with this devastating news," she said in a statement issued Friday. "But no state, including Michigan, can protect our domestic auto industry from the effects of unfair trade agreements and tremendous health care burden that only American manufacturers bear. We need a federal government that works with us to make sure our companies can compete fairly. Instead, we have an Administration in Washington that is in 'Delphi denial' about the problems facing American manufacturers and American workers."

Williams is excited about the governor's visit and despite employment troubles here, agrees there is reason for celebration. "I don't think, because you hear disappointing news, you should stop thinking about good things," he said.

Granholt signed Senate Bill 318 into law Tuesday, making Michigan the 18th state to hike its minimum wage. The change will take place Oct. 1, giving hundreds of thousands of workers pay raises.

"People on minimum wage are finally getting the pay increase they deserve," Granholm spokeswoman Liz Boyd said. "These people have been left behind."

Williams said the increase in pay will have a positive effect on the local economy. "Those people are going to be spending money," he said.

Despite threats to area jobs, people in mid-Michigan must keep a positive outlook, Williams said. "It's no small thing," he said he said of the Delphi situation. "But we've come through hard times before."

He knows first-hand the fears that Delphi workers are facing as the company requests that a bankruptcy court cancel the company's union contracts, close local plants and eliminate retiree health and life insurance benefits.

Before his election to the state House, Williams was a supervisor there.

"I'm like everybody else who is currently working or retired from Delphi," Williams said. "But I'm not in a panic mode. I won't worry about it until something happens, if it does."

<http://www.ourmidlandforums.com/http://www.ourmidlandforums.com/>

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Bay City Times Letters

April 2, 2006

## Working poor

Voice: Mike Malleck, Bay City

In reply to Tony Dearing's column about the "Income Tax break for the poor might help more than a minimum wage increase" (Opinions Page, March 12), I'd like to congratulate Tony for not thinking this whole article through.

According to his column, the Washington-based Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, there are but five states in which a family of four living on less than \$14,000 a year has to pay state income tax. We are one of them. That has led to a call for Michigan to adopt a state earned income tax that would cut the tax burden on the working poor.

The standard exclusion for each dependent on the state of Michigan income tax return is \$3,200. For each child age 18 and under they get an additional \$600.

For a family of four, this equals \$14,000

If this family makes \$14,000 and their exclusion is \$14,000, there is no tax owed to Michigan.

When they file their federal tax return, with nothing taken out for federal income tax, they will get a federal refund of \$4,850 due to the earned income tax credit and the additional child tax credit. Let's assume that they pay rent of \$400 per month for 12 months. The state will give them a rent credit of \$282. They are also eligible for a heat credit from the state of \$195 for a total of \$477.

A hike in the minimum wage of \$1.80 per hour translates to \$72 for a 40-hour work week. If you work 50 weeks and get \$72 more per week, this is a \$3,600-a-year increase. If I was a working poor, I think I would prefer the minimum wage increase over any proposed state income tax credit.

A noble editorial, but you should have done a little more research.

Detroit News

Monday, April 03, 2006

## **Human Services office in Lincoln Park to close**

The state Department of Human Services will close its Lincoln Park office on April 21 and reassign cases to its Detroit office as part of a statewide consolidation program to save money and increase efficiency.

No layoffs will be involved in the closing. Lincoln Park clients will receive a letter notifying them where their case has been reassigned to, along with the address and phone number of the specialist.

"Generally, when we close down offices, it's for efficiency and economic reasons," said Maureen Sorbet, a department spokeswoman. "It is usually invisible for the client and makes for a better operation."

The Lincoln Park office, 999 Fort, will close April 21 at the end of the business day. The Detroit office, also known as the Fort Wayne District Office, is at 6534 W. Jefferson.

For information about the Department of Human Services and its change, visit [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs).

*Eric Lacy*

# This Week in Washington

For the week ending 3/31/2006, Vol. XXVII, No. 8

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## House Budget Committee Passes Resolution

On March 29, the House Budget Committee passed its fiscal year 2007 budget resolution along a party-line vote of 22–17. The resolution calls for an \$837 billion cap on discretionary funding and included reconciliation instructions for eight committees to find a total of \$65 billion in savings over five years in mandatory programs. The Ways and Means Committee, which has jurisdiction over most mandatory human service programs, was asked to find \$4 billion in savings. The Energy and Commerce Committee, with jurisdiction over Medicaid and Medicare, was spared from identifying any cuts. Savings instructions to other committees with human service programs included Education and the Workforce (\$1.3 billion) and Agriculture (\$55 million). During the debate, Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) offered an amendment to add \$7 billion to restore funding to programs under the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education appropriations subcommittee, but the amendment failed. However, Rep. Michael Castle (R-Del.) is pushing for similar language to be added to the resolution before it is voted on by the full House (as early as next week). In addition, 25 Republicans signed onto a letter circulated by Reps. Nancy Johnson (R-Conn.) and Michael Castle (R-Del.) expressing their concern over voting for a resolution that contains such funding cuts. Last week, the Senate passed its version of the FY 2007 budget resolution, which did not include reconciliation language on mandatory programs and also restored \$8 billion to discretionary funding. Unlike the Senate version, the House resolution does not include funds to make up for the expected 2007 shortfall in State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) funding. Also, it would not provide funds to cover an extension of Transitional Medical Assistance (TMA) for families leaving welfare for work. The Senate resolution provides about \$700 million for health care mandatory programs that could be used towards filling the expected SCHIP shortfall and extension of TMA.

## HHS Releases LIHEAP Funds After Passage of New Funding Law

On March 20, President Bush signed legislation (P.L. 109-204) to shift \$1 billion of Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funding from FY 2007 to FY 2006. The measure had been introduced as S. 2320 by Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine). The funds had originally been authorized for FY 2007 by the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA, P.L. 109-171), but the new legislation amends the DRA to make the funds available this year. The new amounts include \$500 million in LIHEAP formula funding and \$500 million in emergency funding. The legislation prohibits use of the new funding for certain planning and administrative activities. On March 23, the U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services (HHS) announced the release of \$1 billion in LIHEAP funding to states. HHS retains an additional \$101 million of FY 2006 emergency LIHEAP funding for future crises. More information, including the amount released to each state, is available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news/press/2006pres/20060323a.html>.

### **APHSA and Other Organizations Call on Congress to Reject SSBG Cuts**

On March 28, the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) joined with over 30 other organizations in asking congressional leaders to reject any proposals to reduce funding to the Social Services Block Grant. Some of the other organizations joining with APHSA were the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Child Welfare League of America, United Way of America, Catholic Charities USA, and the National Association of Counties.

### **Second Lawsuit Filed Against Budget Law**

On March 21, Public Citizen, a nonprofit public interest organization, filed a lawsuit in federal court seeking to overturn the DRA. The legislation was signed into law on February 8 and saves \$39 billion over five years through cuts in Medicaid and other human service programs. Like an earlier suit filed by an Alabama attorney (see This Week, February 17), this action seeks to overturn the law because a Senate clerk altered a figure in the bill between consideration by the Senate and House. As a result, the two bodies did not pass identical legislation, as required under the Constitution. House and Senate leaders have certified that the signed version represented the intent of both bodies, but supporters of the suits contend that is insufficient to meet the constitutional requirement. More information is available at <http://www.citizen.org/pressroom/release.cfm?ID=2156>.

### **Hearing Held on Medicaid Fraud, Waste, and Abuse Control**

On March 28, the Senate Homeland Security Federal Financial Management Subcommittee held a hearing on fraud in the Medicaid program. The panel's chair, Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), said health care providers are cheating the Medicaid program because "no one thinks they're going to get caught." Dennis Smith, director of the Center for Medicaid and State Operations at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), testified that a program is being developed to help control fraud at both the federal and state levels, and will likely be ready within the next six weeks. He also said that the DRA includes funding for additional staff and resources to address Medicaid fraud. Smith also noted that CMS will increase oversight of state program integrity through training and best-practice guidance. In addition to discussing activities at the federal level, Smith highlighted successful state programs in which state and federal officials have worked together to control fraud and uncover fraudulent activities. Also testifying was Leslie Aronovitz, director of health care at the Government Accountability Office (GAO). Aronovitz focused on provisions in the DRA designed to address fraud and abuse, with specific attention paid to the implementation of the new Medicaid Integrity Program. She said GAO views the Medicaid Integrity Program as a unique opportunity for CMS to strengthen its leadership of state and federal efforts to control Medicaid fraud, waste, and abuse. However, certain challenges were noted as well, including the development of a comprehensive plan for the program. The GAO testimony is available online at <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d06578t.pdf>.

### **House and Senate Panels Review USDA Budget Request**

This week, agriculture appropriations panels in the House (on March 28) and Senate (on March 30) reviewed the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) FY 2007 budget request. Eric Bost, USDA undersecretary for food, nutrition, and consumer services, testified at both hearings. At the Senate hearing, Bost began by acknowledging the accomplishments of his agency's staff and others, including APHSA, in quickly bringing FSP benefits to hurricane victims last fall. The administration's budget request asks for \$57 billion for federal nutrition programs, including \$37.9 billion for the FSP and an additional \$3 billion contingency reserve as protection against low estimates for the program's funding. The budget anticipates an FY 2007 caseload of 25.9 million persons. Bost noted that the administration

proposes dropping the Commodity Supplemental Food Program, saying that many of the benefits offered under the program overlap with those available through other nutrition programs.

### **Pombo Named to No. 2 Spot on House Agriculture Committee**

On March 23, Rep. Bob Goodlatte (R-Va.), chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, announced that Rep. Richard Pombo (R-Calif.) has been named the new vice chairman of the panel. The post was held by Rep. John Boehner (R-Ohio), who was elected last month as House Majority Leader. Goodlatte also announced the addition of Rep. Mike Sodrel (R-Ind.) to the committee roster, and that committee member Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-Ohio) has been assigned to the panel's nutrition subcommittee. More information is available at <http://agriculture.house.gov/press/109/pr060323.html>.

### **SSA Says New Disability Determinations System Will Speed Processing**

On March 28, Social Security Administration (SSA) Commissioner Jo Anne Barnhart announced a new process for disability claims. She said the new program should shorten decision times and properly pay benefits to disabled individuals in a more timely fashion, including the issuance of favorable determinations within 20 days after a new claim is received. The new process will start in the Boston region, which includes Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. After implementation in the Boston region, SSA will phase in the new process throughout the remaining regions. In addition to quicker determinations for individuals, the new process is designed to provide a new Medical-Vocational Expert System to ensure the accuracy of the determinations; a federal reviewing officer to review the state determinations upon request of the claimant; the continued right to request a de novo hearing if the claimant disagrees with the decision; closing the record after the administrative law judge has issued his or her decision, with a provision for good cause exceptions; and a new Decision Review Board to review and correct errors and ensure consistent adjudication. More information is available at [www.ssa.gov/pressoffice/pr/DSI-pr-alt.pdf](http://www.ssa.gov/pressoffice/pr/DSI-pr-alt.pdf).

### **USDA Releases Summary of Farm Bill Comments**

On March 29, USDA released a summary of the public comments that were submitted verbally and in writing during USDA's farm bill forum listening tour held last year. According to USDA, the summaries will serve as a basis for the department's policy review and analysis in preparation for the farm bill's reauthorization next year. The farm bill is the legislative vehicle for reauthorization of the FSP and other federal nutrition programs. USDA has prepared a paper on each of the subject areas covered during the forums, including the FSP. Many of the comments released by USDA closely track APHSA's FSP recommendations published last year in Crossroads II: New Directions in Social Policy. Among them are calls for changes that would reduce barriers to participation by the elderly; a simplified FSP application process, including reduced required use of the face-to-face interview; alternative means of applying for and becoming initially attached to the program, such as through food banks; expanding combined application projects for the elderly and disabled; restoration of eligibility to all legal non-citizens; a higher minimum benefit; preservation and extension of existing categorical eligibility rules; increases in asset limits; additional alignments with other income assistance programs; improvements in work program rules and funding; additional and improved standard deductions; restoration of true 50-50 federal match, and enhanced match for such changes as automation; and a new, more suitable name for the program. More details on the comments are available at <http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usdahome>.

### **GAO Issues Report on Offshoring in Human Services**

On March 28, GAO issued a report, Offshoring in Six Human Services Programs. The report examines state contracts that include services outsourced to foreign countries in three public human services programs, the FSP, TANF, and child support enforcement. The report also covered unemployment insurance and two federally administered student financial aid programs. GAO found that offshoring occurred in one or more of these programs in 43 of 50 states and the District of Columbia, most

frequently in the FSP and TANF. The expenditures for services performed offshore (largely functions related to customer service and software development) were relatively small. Expenditures for contracts that contained some offshored services totaled about \$339 million (about 18 percent of the total expenditures in FSP, TANF, child support, and unemployment insurance), but the bulk of services in these contracts was performed in the United States. For example, the company that holds the majority of contracts containing offshored services in FSP and TANF estimated that the offshored work constituted less than 3 percent of the total. State officials reported that lower costs are a benefit of offshore services, and few identified any problems with the services. Two states, New Jersey and Arizona, have prohibited offshoring in contracts, and at least five other states have restrictions such as requirements for contractors to disclose when state-contracted work is performed offshore. Nine states have relocated previously offshored FSP or TANF call center services to the United States. The full report (GAO-06-342) is available at <http://www.gao.gov/>.

#### **Department of Education Announces Availability of Migrant Even Start Grants**

On March 28, the Department of Education announced the availability of grants under the Migrant Education Even Start (MEES) Family Literacy Program. The purpose of MEES grants is to improve the education opportunities of migratory agricultural or fishing families through the integration of early childhood education, adult literacy or basic education, and parenting education. Any entity, including state or local government agencies and community-based organizations, is eligible to apply. The department estimates that 10 grants ranging from \$150,000 to \$500,000 per year will be awarded. Applications must be submitted by May 12, 2006. The notice was published in the March 28, 2006, Federal Register (71 FR 15389-15392), and is available online at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.

#### **ACF Announces Evaluation of Child Care Subsidy Strategies**

On March 24, the Administration for Children and Families announced a request for comments regarding three research projects testing aspects of the child care subsidy system. An experiment in Cook County, Ill., will examine the impact of child care subsidies on parental employment and income and the stability of child care arrangements. The experiment will also examine the effects of one-year subsidy certification versus six-month certification. Research in Washington will examine different co-payment structures. Finally, a study in Massachusetts will test the outcomes associated with implementation of a developmental curriculum in family child care homes. Comments should be submitted within 30 days. The notice was published in the March 24, 2006, Federal Register (71 FR 14926-14927), and is available online at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html>.





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## News Release

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### Governor Granholm Declares April 3 Safe Delivery Day

*Safe Delivery of Newborns Act provides alternative to abandoning newborns*

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April 3, 2006

LANSING – In an effort to eliminate incidences in which newborns are abandoned in hazardous locations, DHS Director Marianne Udow, Michigan Department of Community Health Director Janet Olszewski and Michigan State Police Director Col. Tadarial J. Sturdivant today joined together to remind parents that the Michigan Safe Delivery of Newborns law provides a safe alternative for both the child and parent.



**1-866-733-7733**

"Many of the parents who abandon newborns are teens or young adults who are not ready emotionally or financially to be a parent," Udow said. "While there are a number of reasons a young, scared parent may abandon a baby, this newborn abandonment phenomenon has led many states to look at how they can prevent these incidents from occurring, thus saving lives."

Under Michigan's Safe Delivery of Newborns law, a parent can anonymously surrender an infant, from birth to 72 hours of age, to an emergency service provider – a uniformed (or otherwise identified) employee of a fire department, hospital or police station that is inside the building and on duty. Granholm was a supporter of the law that went into effect in January 2001, 32 newborns have been safely surrendered in Michigan.

"By surrendering their newborn to an emergency service provider, a parent can be assured they are leaving their child in a safe environment where he or she will be well taken care of," Sturdivant said.

A toll-free, 24-hour telephone line has been established to provide information on services available to a prospective parent. That toll-free number is: 1-866-733-7733.

According to the law, the parent has the choice to leave the infant without giving any identifying information to the emergency service provider. While a parent may remain anonymous, he or she is encouraged to provide family and medical background that could be useful to the baby in the future.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that as many as 100 newborns are abandoned in public places each year, with nearly a third of those infants found dead.

-MORE-

Once a newborn is in the custody of an emergency service provider, the baby is taken to a hospital for an examination. If there are no signs of abuse and/or neglect, temporary protective custody is given to a private adoption agency for placement with an approved adoptive family. If the examination reveals signs of abuse and/or neglect, hospital personnel will initiate a referral to Children's Protective Services for an investigation.

"There are many families out there who want to adopt a newborn," Udow said. "This law helps ensure that newborns who are unwanted by their birth parents have a good home where they can grow up healthy and happy."

New signage for Safe Delivery locations was also unveiled during today's news conference at the Sparrow Professional Building in Lansing. The new signs designating hospitals, fire stations and police stations as Safe Delivery sites will be posted in the next couple of months at sites across the state.

For more information about Safe Delivery, visit the DHS Web site at [www.michigan.gov/dhs](http://www.michigan.gov/dhs)

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